

Judicial Community

Survey Report

2009

Department of Health and Social Services

Office of Children's Services

Introduction

The Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services, provides a system of family services designed to meet the needs of parents and children. The family services are provided to parents whose children are residing in out-of-home care as well as to families whose children have been reunited or who were never placed out-of-home.

When children cannot be safely maintained in their own homes, the Office of Children's Services, as part of its statutory child protection mandate, has authority to assume legal and physical custody of children. The agency will initiate and coordinate out-of-home placement.

A system of judicial oversight and involvement occurs throughout the process of children being in out-of-home care. Cases which involve custody are petitioned and adjudicated through the court system. Participants in the process include judges, masters, magistrates, public defenders, assistant attorneys general, and Guardians ad Litem. The judicial system's role ensures that families' needs are addressed and that the well-being of children remains the focus of all case activities.

The Office of Children's Services strives to maintain programs that deliver a high standard of care. The agency has a continuous quality improvement process in place to monitor and improve service delivery to families. As part of this continuous quality improvement process, information is sought through annual surveys from agencies and groups with whom the Office of Children's Services works. This information serves to assist management and staff in identifying areas for improvement and in developing and implementing program improvement activities.

Survey Methods

The Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children's Services conducted a mailed survey that was sent to members of the judicial community throughout the state to solicit information and comments regarding service delivery of the Office of Children's Services. The survey asked questions regarding overall case management activities including active efforts on cases and the assessment of families' needs. The area of case planning was explored with inquiries on the initiation of concurrent planning and the timeliness of permanency planning. Other areas of inquiry included agency efforts to support children's cultural traditions and responsiveness to inquiries about case activities.

Survey Respondents

There were 70 surveys completed and returned from the 180 surveys sent, for a response rate of 39%. Responses were received from every type of position and from each judicial district of the state. The number of surveys sent and responses received by position and judicial district are presented in tables one and two.

Table 1

Surveys Sent and Responses by Position, Number, and Percent			
Title of Position	Number of Surveys Sent	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Judge	45	15	33%
Master or Magistrate	14	6	43%
Assistant Attorney General	24	16	67%
Public Defender	48	9	19%
Guardian ad Litem	49	24	49%
Total	180	70	39%

Table 2

Surveys Sent and Responses by Judicial District, Number, and Percent			
Judicial District	Number of Surveys Sent	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
First District	26	12	46%
Second District	12	5	42%
Third District	95	40	42%
Fourth District	47	13	28%
Total	180	70	39%

Findings

The responses were compiled and analyzed. The responses for each data presentation are sorted by respondent position for display in the tables of findings in this report. There were five content areas in which questions on the survey were asked. These areas are case assessment and planning, communication, active efforts, service array, and worker knowledge. The question from the survey is presented followed by a table of the findings. The numbers presented in each area may not equal the total number of survey participants, as some participants did not respond to every question.

- **Child in Need of Aid petitions fully describe the active efforts by the agency to prevent the removal of children.**

Table 3

Active Efforts are Reflected in the Agency's Petitions by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	12	80%	1	7%	2	13%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	2	33%	1	17%
Assistant Attorney General	9	56%	2	13%	5	31%
Public Defender	3	33%	2	22%	4	45%
Guardian ad Litem	14	58%	4	17%	6	25%
Total	41	58%	11	16%	18	26%

- Relative searches are conducted in a timely manner and are comprehensive.

Table 4

Comprehensive Relative Searches are Timely by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	10	67%	3	20%	2	13%
Master or Magistrate	4	67%	2	33%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	5	31%	5	31%	6	38%
Public Defender	1	11%	2	22%	6	67%
Guardian ad Litem	6	25%	5	21%	13	54%
Total	26	37%	17	24%	27	39%

- There are efforts made to place siblings in the same home.

Table 5

Efforts are Made to Place Siblings Together by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	15	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Master or Magistrate	5	83%	1	17%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	16	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Public Defender	7	78%	1	11%	1	11%
Guardian ad Litem	19	79%	3	13%	2	8%
Total	62	89%	5	7%	3	4%

- When siblings are not placed in the same home, regular visitation between the children is arranged.

Table 6

Visitation for Siblings is Arranged by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	8	53%	6	40%	1	7%
Master or Magistrate	1	17%	5	83%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	8	50%	4	25%	4	25%
Public Defender	1	11%	3	33%	5	56%
Guardian ad Litem	6	25%	0	0%	18	75%
Total	24	34%	18	26%	28	40%

- When children are placed out of home, there are regular and frequent visitations between parents and children.

Table 7

Parents and Children Visitation Occurs Regularly by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	5	33%	3	20%	7	47%
Master or Magistrate	1	17%	4	67%	1	16%
Assistant Attorney General	2	12%	3	19%	11	69%
Public Defender	1	11%	1	11%	7	78%
Guardian ad Litem	13	57%	0	0%	10	43%
Total	22	32%	11	16%	36	52%

- The case assessment process is carried out through identification of the individual needs of children and parents as well as the overall family needs.

Table 8

Children and Families' Needs are Assessed by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	11	73%	4	27%	0	0%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	11	69%	3	19%	2	12%
Public Defender	0	0%	3	33%	6	67%
Guardian ad Litem	16	67%	5	21%	3	12%
Total	41	58%	18	26%	11	16%

- Effective case planning is conducted through the development of comprehensive case plans which address the needs of parents and children and which target services to meet those needs.

Table 9

Case Planning Identifies Appropriate Services by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	11	73%	1	7%	3	20%
Master or Magistrate	2	33%	4	67%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	8	50%	4	25%	4	25%
Public Defender	0	0%	2	22%	7	78%
Guardian ad Litem	9	39%	4	17%	10	44%
Total	30	43%	15	22%	24	35%

- **Parents and age-appropriate children are involved in the development of their case plans.**

Table 10

Parents and Children are Involved in Case Planning by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	11	74%	2	13%	2	13%
Master or Magistrate	1	17%	4	66%	1	17%
Assistant Attorney General	9	56%	2	13%	5	31%
Public Defender	1	11%	2	22%	6	67%
Guardian ad Litem	12	50%	4	17%	8	33%
Total	34	49%	14	20%	22	31%

- **The educational needs of children are assessed and services to meet the needs are reflected in the case plan.**

Table 11

Children's Educational Needs are Assessed and Services Provided by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	12	80%	2	13%	1	7%
Master or Magistrate	2	33%	4	67%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	10	62%	3	19%	3	19%
Public Defender	3	33%	4	45%	2	22%
Guardian ad Litem	8	35%	7	30%	8	35%
Total	35	51%	20	29%	14	20%

- The mental health needs of children are assessed and services to meet the needs are reflected in the case plan.

Table 12

Mental Health Needs are Assessed and Services Provided by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	13	86%	1	7%	1	7%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	13	81%	1	6%	2	13%
Public Defender	3	33%	0	0%	6	67%
Guardian ad Litem	8	35%	3	13%	12	52%
Total	40	58%	8	12%	21	30%

- There is an adequate array of services available in my community to meet children's and parents' needs.

Table 13

Adequate Services Available in Community by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	4	27%	2	13%	9	60%
Master or Magistrate	1	17%	2	33%	3	50%
Assistant Attorney General	2	13%	0	0%	14	87%
Public Defender	1	11%	0	0%	8	89%
Guardian ad Litem	5	22%	1	4%	17	74%
Total	13	19%	5	7%	51	74%

- **If there are services which are not available in your community please check the areas below in which services are needed.**

Of note is those judicial community respondents who indicated “Other” were able to write in the services not available in their community. Services identified included wrap around services, parenting skills training, and anger management counseling.

Table 14

Service Availability Needed in Community by Service, Position, and Percent								
Service Needed	Judge, Master, and Magistrate		Assistant Attorney General		Public Defender		Guardian ad Litem	
	Number	Per- cent*	Number	Per- cent*	Number	Per- cent*	Number	Per- cent*
Mental Health Assessment for Children	5	24%	8	50%	5	56%	11	46%
Mental Health Assessment for Parent	4	19%	7	44%	6	67%	9	38%
Outpatient Substance Abuse Treatment	5	24%	6	38%	3	33%	9	38%
Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	13	62%	10	63%	4	44%	14	58%
Individual Mental Health Counseling for Parent	6	29%	8	50%	6	67%	9	38%
Individual Mental Health Counseling for Child	7	33%	7	44%	6	67%	12	50%
Domestic Violence Assessment	7	33%	6	38%	5	56%	8	33%
Other	3	14%	6	38%	3	33%	9	38%

*Presents percent of survey respondents by position category who selected the service as needed.

- **The lack of services in my community prevents children from being returned home in a timely manner.**

Table 15

Lack of Community Services Prevents Timely Reunification by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	9	60%	1	7%	5	33%
Master or Magistrate	4	67%	2	33%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	10	63%	4	25%	2	12%
Public Defender	8	89%	0	0%	1	11%
Guardian ad Litem	14	58%	5	21%	5	21%
Total	45	64%	12	17%	13	19%

- **Services to families are monitored and changes in the case plan are made as the family makes progress or does not make progress.**

Table 16

Case Plans are Updated When Service Needs Change by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	11	74%	2	13%	2	13%
Master or Magistrate	1	17%	4	67%	1	16%
Assistant Attorney General	8	50%	2	13%	6	37%
Public Defender	1	11%	0	0%	8	89%
Guardian ad Litem	12	50%	3	13%	9	37%
Total	33	47%	11	16%	26	37%

- Concurrent case goals are established and implemented in a timely manner.

Table 17

Concurrent Goals are Established in a Timely Manner by Respondent Position Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	9	60%	3	20%	3	20%
Master or Magistrate	2	33%	3	50%	1	17%
Assistant Attorney General	7	44%	3	19%	6	37%
Public Defender	0	0%	0	0%	9	100%
Guardian ad Litem	15	63%	2	8%	7	29%
Total	33	47%	11	16%	26	37%

- When families do not make progress the termination of parental rights petition is filed in a timely manner.

Table 18

Termination Petitions are Filed in a Timely Manner by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	11	73%	3	20%	1	7%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	2	33%	1	17%
Assistant Attorney General	4	25%	9	56%	3	19%
Public Defender	3	33%	4	45%	2	22%
Guardian ad Litem	5	21%	2	8%	17	71%
Total	26	37%	20	29%	24	34%

- Termination of parental rights hearings occur in a manner which facilitates timely adoptions.

Table 19

Termination Hearings are Timely by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	7	47%	3	20%	5	33%
Master or Magistrate	1	17%	4	67%	1	16%
Assistant Attorney General	9	56%	4	25%	3	19%
Public Defender	1	11%	3	33%	5	56%
Guardian ad Litem	3	12%	4	17%	17	71%
Total	21	30%	18	26%	31	44%

- Adoptions are completed in a timely manner.

Table 20

Adoption Completion is Timely by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	6	40%	5	33%	4	27%
Master or Magistrate	1	17%	4	67%	1	16%
Assistant Attorney General	6	38%	6	37%	4	25%
Public Defender	1	11%	5	56%	3	33%
Guardian ad Litem	4	17%	5	21%	15	62%
Total	18	26%	25	36%	27	38%

- Case activities reflect understanding and sensitivity to the cultural needs of children and parents.

Table 21

Cultural Needs are Reflected in Case Activities by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	11	73%	3	20%	1	7%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	11	69%	2	12%	3	19%
Public Defender	0	0%	4	44%	5	56%
Guardian ad Litem	10	42%	7	29%	7	29%
Total	35	50%	19	27%	16	23%

- OCS workers visit the children in person at least on a monthly basis.

Table 22

Worker Visits With Children Occur Monthly by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	4	27%	5	33%	6	40%
Master or Magistrate	0	0%	6	100%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	11	69%	2	12%	3	19%
Public Defender	1	11%	4	44%	4	45%
Guardian ad Litem	13	57%	3	13%	7	30%
Total	29	42%	20	29%	20	29%

- OCS workers visit the parents in person on at least a monthly basis.

Table 23

Worker Visits With Parents Occur Monthly by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	4	27%	5	33%	6	40%
Master or Magistrate	0	0%	6	100%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	5	31%	6	38%	5	31%
Public Defender	0	0%	2	22%	7	78%
Guardian ad Litem	6	26%	9	39%	8	35%
Total	15	22%	28	40%	26	38%

- Decisions by the Office of Children's Services are objective and fair to the families with whom they work.

Table 24

Decisions Made by OCS are Fair and Objective by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	11	73%	4	27%	0	0%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	13	81%	1	6%	2	13%
Public Defender	0	0%	1	11%	8	89%
Guardian ad Litem	12	52%	7	30%	4	18%
Total	39	57%	16	23%	14	20%

- **Workers are knowledgeable regarding the case histories and the activities of the families with whom they work.**

Table 25

Workers are Knowledgeable About the Families They Serve by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	13	87%	0	0%	2	13%
Master or Magistrate	2	33%	3	50%	1	17%
Assistant Attorney General	11	74%	2	13%	2	13%
Public Defender	1	11%	1	11%	7	78%
Guardian ad Litem	10	44%	4	17%	9	39%
Total	37	54%	10	15%	21	31%

- **Workers demonstrate adequate knowledge of the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act.**

Table 26

Workers are Knowledgeable about ICWA by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	13	87%	2	13%	0	0%
Master or Magistrate	4	67%	2	33%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	11	69%	4	25%	1	6%
Public Defender	0	0%	1	11%	8	89%
Guardian ad Litem	14	61%	5	22%	4	17%
Total	42	61%	14	20%	13	19%

- **Workers are receptive to receiving feedback and alternate opinions pertaining to cases and services provided to families.**

Table 27

Workers are Receptive to Feedback on Cases by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	7	47%	5	33%	3	20%
Master or Magistrate	2	33%	4	67%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	13	81%	2	13%	1	6%
Public Defender	0	0%	1	11%	8	89%
Guardian ad Litem	13	56%	5	22%	5	22%
Total	35	51%	17	25%	17	24%

- **Written work such as petitions, reports, and letters is comprehensive and reflects the activities of the case.**

Table 28

Case Writing Reflects the Case Activities by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	10	67%	4	27%	1	6%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	1	17%	2	33%
Assistant Attorney General	8	50%	3	19%	5	31%
Public Defender	1	11%	1	11%	7	78%
Guardian ad Litem	11	48%	8	35%	4	17%
Total	33	48%	17	25%	19	27%

- **Workers' written presentations are submitted in a timely manner.**

Table 29

Workers' Written Work is Submitted in a Timely Manner by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	10	67%	0	0%	5	33%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	2	33%	1	17%
Assistant Attorney General	2	13%	5	31%	9	56%
Public Defender	0	0%	0	0%	9	100%
Guardian ad Litem	6	26%	3	13%	14	61%
Total	21	30%	10	15%	38	55%

- **Your telephone, e-mail, and written inquiries are responded to in a timely manner.**

Table 30

Responses to Inquires are Timely by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	11	79%	3	21%	0	0%
Master or Magistrate	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%
Assistant Attorney General	8	50%	4	25%	4	25%
Public Defender	3	33%	0	0%	6	67%
Guardian ad Litem	15	63%	2	8%	7	29%
Total	40	58%	12	17%	17	25%

- **Workers demonstrate adequate knowledge of the judicial system and processes to work effectively within the system.**

Table 31

Workers are Knowledgeable of the Judicial System and Processes by Respondent Position, Number, and Percent						
Position	Strongly Agree and Agree		Undecided		Disagree and Strongly Disagree	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Judge	12	80%	3	20%	0	0%
Master or Magistrate	5	83%	0	0%	1	17%
Assistant Attorney General	9	56%	3	19%	4	25%
Public Defender	2	22%	2	22%	5	56%
Guardian ad Litem	14	58%	3	13%	7	29%
Total	42	60%	11	16%	17	24%

Additional Comments

Respondents were provided an area on the survey instrument to offer other comments that they wished to share with the Office of Children's Services. There were 31 respondents who provided additional comments.

Strengths:

- There were many positive comments regarding the skills and professionalism of workers. Several comments were made regarding timely responses to e-mails and phone calls. It was noted that most workers care about their work and do a good job with sometimes minimal resources.
- It was noted that relative searches have improved. Skill in working with families was identified as a strength in some field offices.
- A comment was made that many social workers are doing excellent casework.
- Workers open communication with families and with providers was identified as a contributing factor to good quality of case work.

Needs:

- There were concerns expressed regarding worker turnover. The impact on the service system due to lack of worker stability was noted. It was felt there is more focus on statistics and paperwork than on actual provision of services. The need for local hire was stated. The need for hiring Alaska Natives was identified. The provision of local support for workers was seen as important in retaining workers.
- There were concerns regarding the training, development, and supervision of workers. It was expressed that there is too little supervision from "top to bottom." It was noted that there is unevenness in worker skills. It was noted that there are some good skills in every worker, but that the skills are not universally present. A mentoring program for workers after SKILS training was recommended.
- There were many comments regarding the need for better overall case management. Included in these comments were a need to involve parents and age-appropriate children in a collaborative case planning process, the need to involve both parents in the case activities, the need for active efforts, and the need to insure service delivery.

- There were concerns expressed regarding the insufficient number of staff in permanency. It was noted there is a need to improve the case planning process to assure that plans are updated regularly. There were concerns expressed that goals are set too high for parents and that more efforts to work with parents need to be made.
- The lack of availability of community resources to provide needed services for families was identified. In many areas this results in a waiting list for services.

Appreciation to Respondents

The response and thoughtful comments to this survey by members of the judicial community are deeply appreciated by the Office of Children's Services and will be incorporated by management and staff in our work to continue to improve our ability to assist families and children.